

How extremism reaches from Gaza into American classrooms

Organizations with terrorist ties are shaping young minds by training teachers in kindergarten through 12th-grade classrooms across the country.



Bookshelves. Credit: Engin Akyurt/Pexels.



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(May 14, 2025 / JNS) A recent report published by the Network Contagion Research Institute (NCRI) highlighted a connection between the Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA), makers of the "Teach Palestine Project," and the Union of Health Work Committees (UHWC) in Gaza, which has financial and personnel ties to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

The PFLP is a U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. Connections between the terror group and UHWC came to light after the 2019 murder of 17-year-old Israeli Rina Shnerb, and was reported on by Matthew Levitt for the Washington Institute for Near East Affairs.

The main link between MECA and the UHWC is Dr. Mona el-Farra, MECA's director of Gaza programming and a former deputy director of the UHWC.

MECA is open about the fact that it has sent money directly to UHWC, and claims the money was for "humanitarian purposes." As for el-Farra, according to her bio, which accompanied an article, "From Gaza with rage," she wrote just days after the Hamas-led terrorist attacks in Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, that she is a "member" of UHWC, not just a former deputy director.

MECA works with numerous community organizations to provide teacher training and curriculum development. Its "Teach Palestine Project" is one of their main programs in the United States. Its curriculum whitewashes Hamas's actions and rebrands terrorism as "resistance."

The Teach Palestine Project took a delegation of teachers to Israel and the Palestinian areas in 2019, and described the trip as an "intense 10-day exploration of the impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian youth and their families." The visit was used to form curriculum for elementary school, middle school and high school students.

Teach Palestine lessons use a distorted view of the situation in Israel and the Palestinian areas to teach American children about youth resistance.

While there is no reference to Hamas, the curriculum does address the events of Oct. 7. It says that "fighters in Gaza, who were angry about how Israel has been treating people in Gaza, broke down the wall and killed many Israeli soldiers and some Israelis who were at a music festival."

This is propaganda. No honest description of Hamas, even for third to fifth graders, should cloak the group's violent antisemitic ideology by asserting that it was merely angry about Israeli mistreatment of Palestinians. And no honest description of the Hamas-led attacks on Oct. 7 should say that only "some" Israelis were killed, when the truth is that 1,200 men, women and children were slaughtered in the bloodiest attack on Jews since the Holocaust.

One would hope that the Teach Palestine curriculum would not find an audience in American schools, but MECA has partners who are helping to bring its message into the classroom, starting with the project's co-coordinators: Samia Shoman, principal of the Bridge Academy, an alternative public high school in San Mateo, Calif., and Judy Sokolower, formerly of Rethinking Schools. A nonprofit organization committed to social justice, teaching and education activism, Rethinking Schools began as a magazine for educators, which it still publishes. The spring 2024 edition of its quarterly magazine had the headline "Teach Palestine."

Rethinking Schools also runs the Zinn Education Project, which features Teach Palestine as a recommended resource, and hosted a webinar promoting Teach Palestine.

MECA also partners with the Xicanx Institute for Teaching and Organizing, XITO, a nonprofit “committed to training teachers, school districts and higher education institutions in decolonial and re-humanizing pedagogies.” It has worked with schools in California, Colorado and New Mexico. Together, MECA and XITO hosted a three-day professional development institute for teachers called “Teaching Land Back: From Turtle Island to Palestine.”

California’s ethnic studies requirement set the stage for XITO to contract with local school districts to provide teacher training and curriculum development. The Santa Ana school district in Orange County, Calif., awarded XITO a \$92,000 contract, but a lawsuit from Jewish advocacy groups forced the district to sever the agreement as part of a settlement addressing antisemitism in the ethnic studies curriculum.

According to another report from NCRI, New York City public school teachers have also used Teach Palestine content in their classrooms, as their contract gives them discretion in selecting materials for class use. The NCRI report also found that a caucus within the United Federation of Teachers recommended resources from Teach Palestine and Rethinking Schools for classroom use.

We need elected officials to take concrete steps to ensure that children are receiving an education and not being indoctrinated with learning materials that are sympathetic to terrorists.

We should not have to rely on research experts to uncover these kinds of incidents. State superintendents of education should audit school districts to determine which nonprofit organizations are providing teacher training and developing their curricula. Governors and state boards of education can draft education codes that prevent extremists from operating in K-12 schools. For example, California Education Code 32261 states that children who attend public school “have the inalienable right to attend classes on school campuses that are safe, secure and peaceful.”

State legislatures and school district administrators should also reconsider proposals and policies that have opened the doors to extremism. Doubtless, many officials support programs like California’s ethnic studies requirement, believing that they would improve student learning and promote tolerance. Unfortunately, these programs are captured by activists whose priority is not to educate, but to indoctrinate.

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